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15 May 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Morning Meeting of 15 May 1969



Godfrey pointed to evidence that the Communists may be using Soviet-provided mine-sweeping vehicles for the first time in the Laotian panhandle.

Godfrey reported that the situation in Kuala Lumpur is still active, with martial law having been lifted and reimposed.

D/ONE mentioned that INR may take some small exception to NIE 30-1-69, The Fedayeen as a Factor in the Middle East. DDCI will chair the meeting.

In response to the Director's question Carver stated that we have no information which would support Le Duc Tho's comment as reported in the Joseph Kraft article in today's Washington Post.

Maury noted that the Director is now scheduled to brief the Rivers Subcommittee on 27 May at 9 a.m.

Maury noted that [redacted] will be briefing Pat Holt of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff on Latin America.

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DD/S&T noted that in a meeting with ACDA yesterday he had a vigorous exchange with Dan Fink of the DDR&E staff. Mr. Gerard Smith attended, and the DD/S&T noted that his input to the meeting seemed to be helpful and appreciated.

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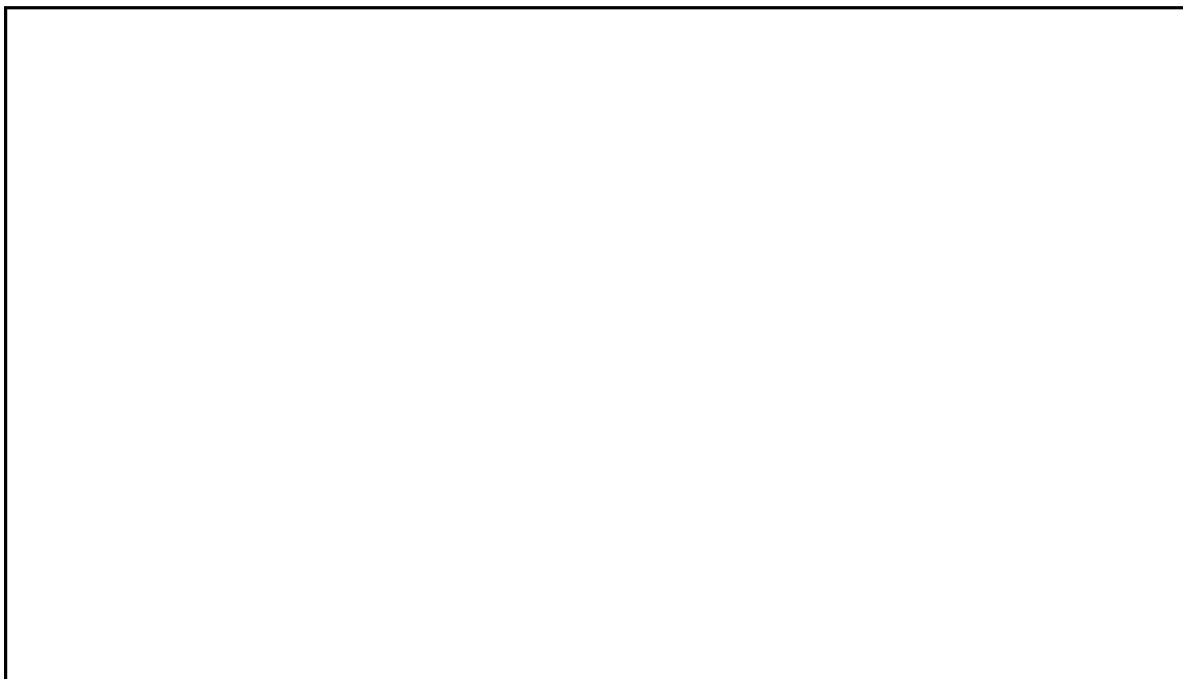
DD/S&T noted that he attended a meeting on [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] He commented that Under Secretary Packard is now enthusiastic about the proposal, and the Director asked the DD/S&T to brief the Executive Director on this matter in order that all its budgetary aspects can be planned for.

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Goodwin noted receipt of two telephone calls, one from AP and the other from Fortune, requesting a briefing on the Soviet arms build-up. The Director asked that the callers be referred to DOD.

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L. K. White

TOP SECRET SENSITIVE



Joseph Kraft

Gimmick Solutions Cast Aside As Nixon Relies on Negotiation

THE PRESIDENT is moving to get out of Vietnam via the negotiations route of the Paris peace talks. He is not going for gimmick solutions based on a unilateral American withdrawal that supposedly leaves the fight to a beefed-up South Vietnamese government and army.

That is the chief import of the Vietnam speech delivered by Mr. Nixon to the Nation last night. And that impression, implicit in the text of the speech, is confirmed by last-minute changes which preceded delivery of the speech.

Originally, Mr. Nixon had not planned to give a major speech on Vietnam at all. He has a horror of the long, full-dress television appearance. Up until last weekend, the idea was that he would have a press conference, opened by a short prepared statement on Vietnam—the same formula he followed in announcing his decision on the ABM, or antiballistic missiles.

But over last weekend, the President decided he did not want any blurring of his message by a bunch of questions on troop withdrawal—not to mention such extraneous business as the draft, the Fortas affair or inflation. He wanted to address himself squarely to the negotiations in a way that would be unambiguously understood by the other side. So he chose to make the formal speech.

In the same vein there is the Washington visit of the chief American negotiator at the Paris talks, Henry Cabot Lodge. His visit was not something planned—like the current Saigon visit of Secretary of State William Rogers, or the recent trip to Washington of General Creighton Abrams, the American commander in Vietnam.

ON THE CONTRARY, Ambassador Lodge was ordered home only after the President had decided on the full-length speech. The reason was to heighten the importance accorded to the Paris negotiations. And, as another little bit of theatrics to the same end, it was arranged for Ambassador Lodge to brief a joint session of the National Security Council and the Cabinet on the Paris negotiations.

Behind this emphasis on the Paris talks there are a multitude of considerations, some recent and others of long standing. On the recent side, there was apparently a highly encouraging comment by Le Duc Tho—the North Vietnamese politburo member and leading Hanoi representative in Paris who returned to the talks early this month after a period of consultations at

home. This comment was not made on any specific point, and its substance is being kept secret. But it is considered by some American officials to be the most positive sign the other side has ever given of serious interest in the Paris negotiations.

Another recent, though less important, event was the ten-point proposal put forward by the other side on May 8. The President probably would have made his statement on Vietnam even if there had been no ten-point program. And some aspects of the Communist program—particularly the insistence that it be taken as a package with each part necessary to all the other parts—were decidedly foreboding.

But there was enough favorable content in the program to require long and intensive analysis by the President's personal staff. The analysis turned up hints that the other side might be willing to accept international supervision of peace arrangements that would accord to the present leaders of Saigon some future role in some future South Vietnam. And thus the President's statement, as originally projected, was changed to include a reference to the latest proposals by the other side.

Probably far more significant than either of these recent developments is a view held at the White House since the beginning of the Administration. American civilian and military officials in Saigon and at the Pentagon may believe that there is a good possibility for major improvement in the performance of the South Vietnamese government and army. They may think it feasible to buy time with the American public through a series of unilateral withdrawals of U.S. troops until the day comes when the Saigon regime—stiffened, maybe, by a modest American contingent—can stand off the other side.

BUT THAT IS not the ruling conviction at the White House. The White House has little confidence the South Vietnamese regime can be built into a sturdy barrier against the other side. It is not interested in pulling out American troops merely to fool the American public into supporting a dubious South Vietnamese buildup.

It is interested in pulling out troops in order to lower the level of fighting, to cut down the casualties and as a sign to everybody that the war is ending. But for a settlement, the Administration is pinning its chief hopes on whether these hopes will

be fulfilled is, of course, another matter. The use of a big public speech to advance proposals has about it a show biz element that is not reassuring. Neither is it clear that the Administration will have the cohesion and discipline to hold combat actions in Vietnam to levels consistent with its diplomatic objectives.

Still, the President seems to be moving in the right direction. If there is no light at the end of the tunnel yet, there is at least a tunnel.

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